



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE
STATE OF MISSOURI
JEFFERSON CITY
65101

MATT BLUNT
SECRETARY OF STATE

STATE CAPITOL
ROOM 208
(573) 751-2379

Dear Legislator:

Last year, the Missouri General Assembly passed, and the Governor signed into law, the most comprehensive changes to our state's election laws in 25 years. One of the key components of that legislation was a requirement for Missouri's local election authorities to establish and submit to my office, a plan for implementation of Early Voting in presidential election years.

For your review I am attaching a report prepared on the benefits of Early Voting to Missouri's election process and the costs associated with implementation. It is my hope that you and your colleagues will make the necessary statutory adjustments and provide funding for the implementation of Early Voting as soon as the state's fiscal condition permits.

If you have any questions about the report or need additional information on Early Voting or our new election laws, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your service to the people of our state and for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Matt Blunt



Early Voting

**A report from the office of Secretary of State
Matt Blunt**

Early Voting's Background

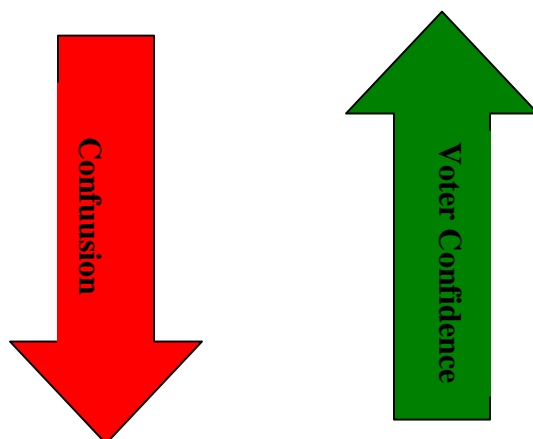
Early Voting, or Advanced Voting originated in Texas in 1991. Since then, fourteen states have followed suit, implementing similar plans that allow voters to cast ballots at established Early Voting locations prior to Election Day. In the states that have adopted Early Voting, the program has been very popular with the voting public and is credited with generating fresh public enthusiasm for elections.

Why Missouri Needs Early Voting

The 2000 General Elections in Missouri and several other states highlighted the need to reform our state and federal election laws to compliment our changing demographics and lifestyles. Voting should be a simple, convenient and user-friendly process that encourages each citizen to express his or her choices. As dual income and single parent families become more prevalent, it is incumbent upon public officials to look for ways to make the ballot more legally accessible to all registered voters. Long lines at polling places in St. Louis in November 2000 helped create a state of confusion

that discouraged potential voters and contributed to the likelihood that fraudulent votes were cast and erroneously counted. Missouri's 2002 Election Reform Bill (Senate Bill 675) brought about identification requirements and provisional voting, two reform measures aimed at securing the ballot against fraudulent votes and protecting every qualified registered voter's right to cast their ballot. We made the ballot more accessible than it had been at any point in our state's history and we enhanced the integrity of the process. Although these measures were certainly strong steps in the right direction, there are still improvements that Missouri can enact in order to ensure fair and honest elections and improve Missourians' confidence in the process.

According to the U.S. Census, in 2000, 2.8 percent of registered voters (one million voters nationwide) who did not vote, said that they did not vote because the lines were too long or the polling hours were too short. By expanding the time that voters can cast their ballots, Early Voting decreases the number of voters that will be at the polls on Election Day. Voting is a personal responsibility. However, election authorities and those in government should constantly strive to make the execution of that civic duty as convenient as possible. It is important to note that if by having an Early Voting system in place a number of potential voters choose to vote at an earlier date that is convenient to them rather than not vote at all, voters' rights are being protected regardless of the overall voter turnout.

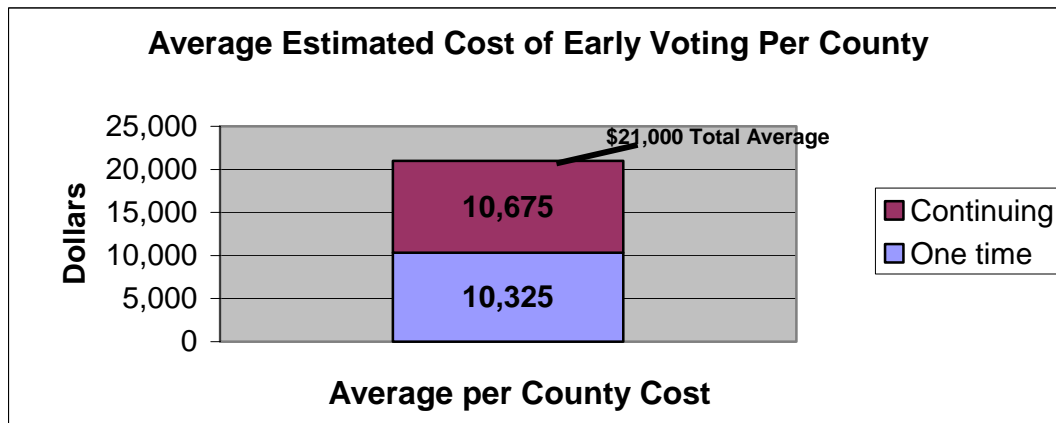
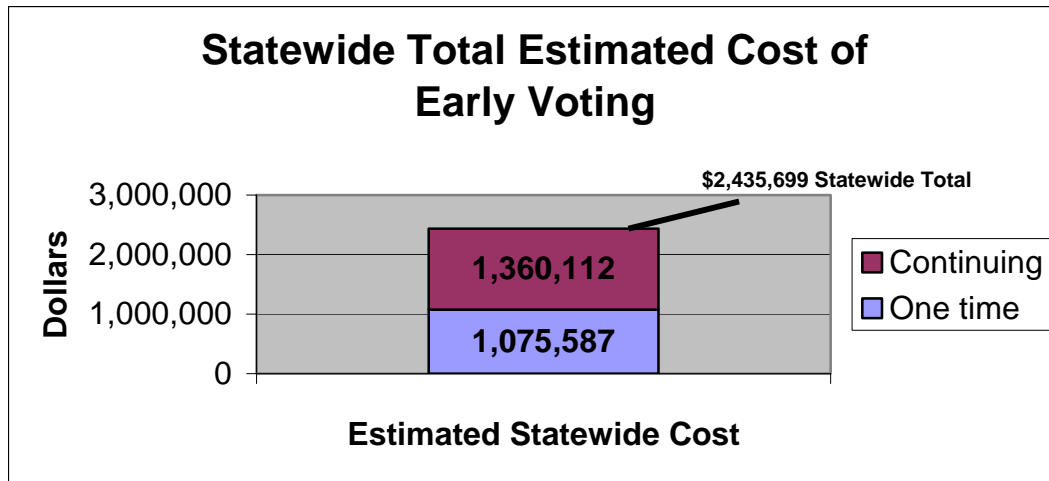


Decreasing voter confusion and increasing voter confidence are two strong benefits of an Early Voting program. An additional benefit is the opportunity Early Voting allows for the election authority to increase the contact the voter has with experienced election personnel. In some election jurisdictions, especially in the state's metropolitan areas, a lack of sufficient election judges detracts from efficient polling place administration and jeopardizes voting security. Under an Early Voting program, permanent election staff members, rather than temporary volunteers, will support early voting sites. This, in turn, will put more voters in contact with experienced election specialists and elevate the quality of the service provided from the election authority to the voter. This also alleviates the rush of voters that turn out on Election Day, particularly during the final hours. Early Voting sites must accommodate the same types of monitors and challengers as traditional polling sites. The scrutiny of political parties is essential to securing a result that all citizens can trust.

Estimated Costs and Locations

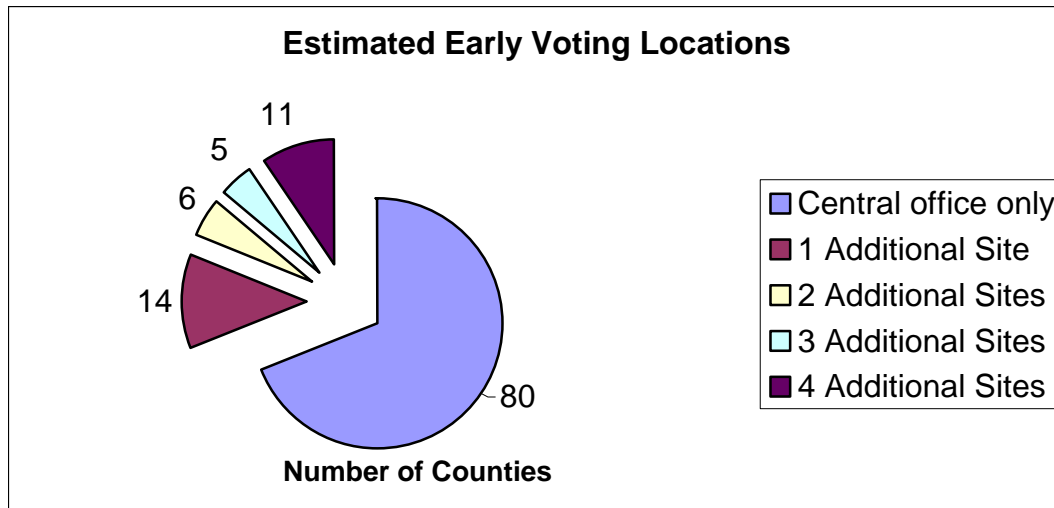
Senate Bill 675 instructed each local election authority to submit a plan to the General Assembly detailing how they would implement Early Voting in their jurisdiction. The plan was to include hours and locations for Early Voting as well as any estimated financial impact their jurisdiction will incur because of the program's implementation. With all 116 election jurisdictions reporting, the total estimated fiscal impact of Early Voting was \$2,435, 699. Of this total, \$1,075, 587 would go towards a one-time purchase of equipment and technology. The average cost per county was \$21,000 total

cost, of that \$10,325 would go towards the one-time purchase of equipment and technology.



Under the current purposed Early Voting plan, election authorities have the option of conducting Early Voting at their central office, or their central office and up to four satellite locations of their choosing. Eighty (80) jurisdictions predicted they would only use the central office. Fourteen (14) jurisdictions predicted using the central office and one (1) additional site. Six (6) jurisdictions predicted using the central office and two (2) additional sites. Five (5) jurisdictions predicted using the central office and three (3)

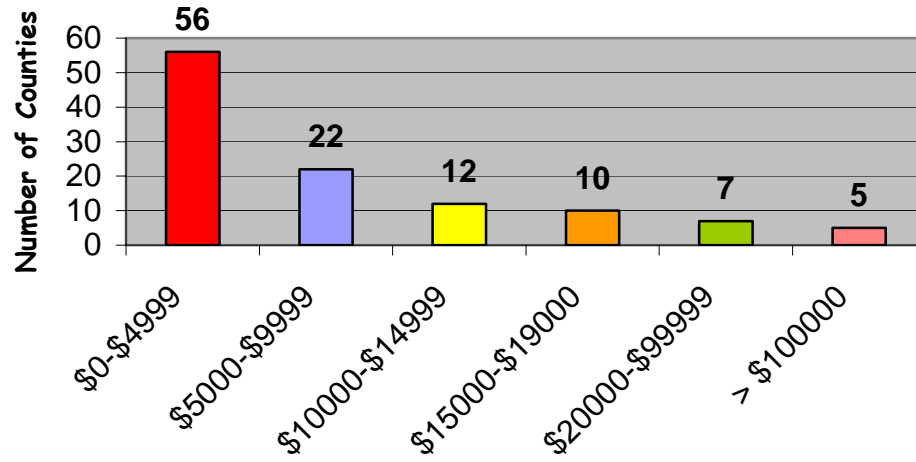
additional sites and eleven (11) jurisdictions predicted using the central office and four (4) additional sites.



Early Voting can be a valuable tool to the election process and a worthwhile benefit to the taxpayers of this state. By decreasing polling place lines on Election Day, the potential for confusion and fraud will be reduced and voter confidence and participation can be expected to rise. Together, we have made great strides over the past two years in making the ballot more accessible to all Missourians. The implementation of Early Voting in Missouri will help us continue these efforts by taking into account the changing lifestyles of our citizens and state government's responsibility to be mindful of these changes and subsequent needs.

I strongly encourage the Missouri General Assembly to enact an Early Voting statute and to appropriate the funds for early voting as soon as the state's fiscal situation allows it to do so.

Early Voting Cost Estimate



Counties' Estimated Cost of Early Voting

Early Voting

(from Chapter 115 RSMO (Supp 2002))

115.126. 1. Notwithstanding any provision of this chapter to the contrary, election authorities shall establish a plan to implement an advance voting period when eligible registered voters may vote before any general election in presidential election years at the office of the election authority and up to four other polling places designated by and under the control of the election authority. Such plan shall provide that the permissible advance voting period shall begin fourteen days prior to such election and end at 5:00 p.m. on the Wednesday before the day of such election.

2. Election authorities shall, pursuant to subsection 1 of this section, establish in their plans the hours and locations for advance voting. The election authority shall have all advance voting locations open on all business days during the advance voting period, and may have all advance voting locations open on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays during the advance voting period.

3. Except as provided in this section, advance voting procedures shall be conducted pursuant to sections 115.407 to 115.445. The secretary of state shall design the necessary application for use in an advance voting program pursuant to this section. All election authorities in this state shall submit to the secretary of state a plan to implement the advance voting period by December 31, 2002. The secretary of state shall assist election authorities in developing a plan for the implementation of an advance voting program.

4. The plans established pursuant to this section shall also require that before the precinct registers are delivered to the polling places for an election, the election authority shall record in the precinct registers the names of all voters who have submitted an advance voting ballot. The election judge shall not allow any person who has voted an advance voting ballot in the election to vote at the polls on Election Day. If it is determined that any voter submitted an advance voting ballot and voted at the polls on election day, such person, having voted more than once, is guilty of a class one election offense pursuant to subdivision (2) of section 115.631